

Table 1 Sources of information for articles on cigars

	Number of mentions
Cigar industry*	26
Cigar smokers (individuals)	9
Health authorities†	5
Other media accounts	5
Survey results	2
Other	12

*Includes the Cigar Association of America, cigar manufacturers, cigar merchants, cigar smoking clubs, and individuals affiliated with the cigar industry.

†Includes volunteer health organisations, health researchers, and public health officials.

coverage,⁶⁻⁹ we could locate no studies of journalists' perspectives on tobacco. We asked how journalists came to write articles about cigars and what sources they used.

Between February 1999 and January 2000 we attempted to contact 79 journalists who wrote at least one cigar focused newspaper article appearing from 1995 to 1997 in one of five national newspapers (*Los Angeles Times*, *New York Times*, *USA Today*, *Washington Post*, and *Wall Street Journal*) or eight California newspapers (*Daily News of Los Angeles*, *Fresno Bee*, *Investors' Business Daily*, *Orange County Register*, *Press Enterprise*, *Sacramento Bee*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *San Diego Union-Tribune*). Of these, 44 were no longer working at the newspapers and left no forwarding information, or did not return persistent calls, one had died, and 14 declined participation. We conducted semi-structured telephone interviews with 21 journalists who wrote cigar focused articles.

The mean number of articles written was 2.43 (range 1-6). Most journalists got their story idea from personal experience (14 mentions) or seeing a similar story elsewhere (10 mentions). The most often cited source of story information was the cigar industry (26 mentions), followed by cigar smokers (9 mentions). The cigar industry was mentioned as a source more than five times as often as health related sources (table 1).

Fifty seven per cent (12/79) of the journalists had received unsolicited information from cigar related groups/individuals, including *Cigar Aficionado* magazine (5 mentions) and the Cigar Association of America (4 mentions). This included press releases (9 mentions) and cigar events invitations (2 mentions). Thirty-eight per cent (8/21) of journalists had sought information from the Cigar Association.

Seventy-six per cent (16/21) of the journalists had ever smoked cigars; however, at the time of interview, only 31% (5/21) were current cigar smokers, and all smoked one cigar or less per week. Sixty two per cent (13/21) had used other tobacco products. Over 84% (16/19) rated smoking one cigar a day as "a little risky" or "very risky" to health. "I think . . . there was this unspoken understanding that 'this is the "safe" tobacco', and the Cancer Society [US National Cancer Institute monograph]¹⁰ did a pretty good job of dispelling that," commented one journalist.

Most said they thought the cigar trend was waning. One journalist said, "Coverage of the cigar trend has been uncritical . . . That's how trends are . . . they go through a life cycle in the public consciousness which the media reflect."

However, media not only reflect but shape social trends. This small study is not general-

isable to all journalists, but it shows that, at least in this instance, the cigar industry may have been well ahead of the public health community in capturing journalists' attention. Health advocates should offer accurate, proactively prepared health information on any tobacco product, be readily available, and be prepared to counter positive industry spin explicitly and creatively. The currency of journalists is news. Making tobacco news requires media advocacy, foresight, and marketing expertise as part of public health skills.

RUTH E MALONE*

LYNN D WENGER†

LISA A BERO‡

*Institute for Health Policy Studies,
Department of Clinical Pharmacy,
and Department of Physiological Nursing

†Institute for Health Policy Studies,
and Department of Clinical Pharmacy,
‡Institute for Health Policy Studies,

University of California,
San Francisco, California, USA
rmalone@itsa.ucsf.edu

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Assessment of cigarette sales to minors in Mexico

EDITOR,—In Mexico approximately 9% of smokers are aged between 12-17 years, and from 1988 to 1998 the prevalence of current smoking among minors increased from 7.7% to 11.6%.¹⁻³ Data from the National Addictions Survey (NAS-98) indicate that 61.4% of adult smokers in Mexico became regular smokers before the age of 18.^{4,5}

We sought to assess compliance with the law forbidding sale of tobacco products to minors in two Mexican cities (Mexico City and Ciudad Juárez).⁶ Compliance monitoring teams were formed, consisting of an adult and two minors. The minors were of both sexes, trained before the start of the study. The adult in each team served as an escort and observer.

Teams attempted to make one purchase per store, the adult entering the store 30 seconds before one of the minors and noting whether age-of-sale warning signs were posted and observing the transaction to purchase a pack of cigarettes between the retailer and the minor. An illegal sale was defined as a transaction in which a retailer sold a pack of cigarettes to a minor. The survey questionnaire was filled in by the adult in each team.

Stores were selected using a non-systematic sampling method by quota, with an unplanned route, in each of the 16 districts in Mexico City, from 23 March to 24 April 1997.

Five hundred and sixty one stores were visited. Data analysis used χ^2 tests to calculate statistical differences in the sales rates associated with the variables.⁷

In February 1999 a similar study was conducted in Ciudad Juárez. The sample was selected by using a stratified cluster design since no lists of cigarette outlets exist. Twenty three clusters were randomly selected. All stores within the selected cluster were visited. Two hundred and forty stores were visited and sampling weights were calculated using SUDAAN.⁸

Of 561 tobacco outlets surveyed in Mexico City, cigarettes were successfully purchased by minors in 443 (79%) stores. In 439/443 occasions, the minors bought the cigarettes directly from the vendors, and not by self service. Warning signs prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors were present in only 64 stores (11.8%) and were not associated with lower sales rates. Only four (0.7%) vendors requested the minors' age; one requested identification; and 30 (5.3%) asked for whom the cigarettes were being purchased.⁷

In the Ciudad Juarez study 240 tobacco outlets was surveyed. The attempt to buy cigarettes was successful in 231 (98.1%) stores. Warning signs prohibiting the sale of tobacco to minors were present in three stores (1.3%). Few of the vendors requested the minors' age (eight, 3.3%), identification (two, 0.8%), or for whom the cigarettes were being purchased (eight, 80%).⁸

This study shows that almost eight out of 10 minors in Mexico City and almost all in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, can easily obtain cigarettes directly from a vendor, despite the sale of tobacco products being prohibited by law.^{9,10} Most vendors did not ask the minors attempting to purchase cigarettes about their age, nor did they request identification. Even the few outlets with warning signs did not show a reduction in tobacco sales to minors. This shows a need to improve vendor compliance, particularly in the formal tobacco outlets, if a reduction in adolescent tobacco use and smoking initiation is to be achieved.¹¹

PABLO KURI-MORALES

Secretariat of Health Mexico
Colonia Unidad Lomas de Plateros,
Mexico

PATRICIA CRAVIOTO

MARIA J HOY
ROBERTO TAPIA-CONYER
Secretariat of Health, Mexico

Correspondence to: Pablo Kuri-Morales
pkuri@epi.org.mx

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BOOK

Book reviews and books of interest to "Tobacco Control" should be sent to the editor at the address given on the inside front cover.

Civil warriors

Civil warriors: the legal siege on the tobacco industry. Dan Zegart. New York: Delacorte Press/Random House, US\$29.95, 385 pages.

Long time tobacco control advocates and newcomers alike are likely to benefit from Dan Zegart's book, *Civil warriors: the legal siege on the tobacco industry*. The tobacco industry's assault on mankind is arguably the biggest story of corporate greed and wrongdoing of all time, yet the number of books on it is astonishingly few.

Zegart spent five years personally shadowing the key figures for this comprehensive legal saga. He employs his considerable skills as an investigative journalist to weave the

page turning saga about how the tobacco industry was finally dragged, kicking and screaming, into a long overdue era of megabuck settlements and stunning courtroom losses.

The story opens with a compelling scene: product liability attorney Ron Motley is sitting by his mother's hospital bed, watching her endure a slow, suffocating death from cigarette induced heart and lung deterioration. As he looks down upon her emaciated body, enshrouded in tubes and plastic and hooked up to a ventilator, he vows vengeance against the cigarette makers: "I'm going to get 'em, Mom. I swear, if it's the last thing I'll do, I'll get 'em." This somewhat melodramatic but gripping scene makes the broad case for society's general anger against the tobacco industry, and provides a meaningful start to the story of *Civil warriors*.

The publication of Zegart's book comes on the heels of the largest punitive damage award ever levelled against the tobacco industry and a wave of anticorporate protests at World Trade Organization gatherings in Seattle and Washington, DC. Both events set the stage for a book about the start of Big Tobacco's downfall to be very timely if not downright appealing. Yet what is missing from the book is the paradoxical fact that the much lauded, multi billion dollar Master Settlement Agreement to which Motley's work led depends almost wholly on the continued

sale of cigarettes to perpetuate it. Absurdly, Motley's greatest achievement actually made it far less likely that makers of the product that killed his mother would be reined in any time soon. Mentioning this fact would have brought the book full circle, but would also have tarnished its main character just a little too much for good storytelling.

Of particular interest was the book's description of David Hardy, of Shook, Hardy and Bacon, the industry's law firm until Hardy's death in 1976. Portrayed as a tough, scrappy mid-westerner who made good, Hardy was described as the architect of the industry's long successful courtroom strategies. The influential relationship Hardy had over Gary Huber, a Harvard researcher who conducted research on behalf of the tobacco industry for many years, was key to providing the industry with the credibility it needed to carry out its deception. Among tobacco control advocates, Huber is both cheered as a whistleblower and reviled as a turncoat. For those with less knowledge about Huber's overall part in the industry's schemes, the book describes why.

While the story centres primarily on Motley, most tobacco control advocates undoubtedly realise that it wasn't the efforts of just one person, but of many passionate and driven people, that brought the industry to the legal threshold where it finds itself today. To his credit, Zegart brings many of these other important characters into the story. Keeping track of all of them, and the role each played, however, can be somewhat of a challenge for the reader, especially those new to this topic.

Civil warriors is a particularly enjoyable read for those obsessed with tobacco control, but I wondered if it would hold as much appeal for those with less interest in the subject? To find out, I introduced the book to two relatives, my sister and brother-in-law (she a 50-ish high school teacher from New York and he a retired dentist who claims to hold stock in Philip Morris). Both declared the book fascinating and one they might buy themselves, showing that it can indeed appeal to people who are not involved in tobacco control on a daily basis.

ANNE LANDMAN

*American Lung Association of Colorado,
West Region Office,
PO Box 3154
Grand Junction, CO 81502
USA
afoxland@gj.net*

